

Louisiana Black Bear
Ursus americanus luteolus



Female with cubs

photo: Paul Davidson

Bear Facts

The Louisiana black bear is one of 16 recognized subspecies of black bears in North America.

Range/Habitat/Population

- The American black bear, *Ursus americanus*, was once found throughout North America from Alaska and northern Canada south to northern Mexico.
- Those bears found in Louisiana, the lower two thirds of Mississippi and in eastern Texas are considered to belong to the subspecies *Ursus americanus luteolus*, the Louisiana black bear.
- Historic accounts refer to Louisiana black bears as common throughout the region, with the greatest densities in the expansive bottomland hardwood forests associated with river basins in the lower Mississippi River Valley.

- By the mid-twentieth century only a few individuals remained along the Mississippi and lower Atchafalaya rivers in eastern Louisiana and possibly neighboring Mississippi.
- Today black bears are found in core areas in the Tensas and Atchafalaya River basins in Louisiana, with small-scattered populations in southeast Louisiana and western Mississippi.
- Remaining populations of black bears in Louisiana exist primarily in bottomland hardwood and floodplain forests, although the use of other habitat does occur. Essential black bear habitat components include food, water, cover, denning sites, and limited human access.
- Biologists estimate the current population to have between 300 and 400 individuals.

Appearance

- Black bears in the region are normally black with a brown muzzle and an occasional white blaze on the chest.
- Average weights are 150 to 350 pounds for adult males and 120 to 250 lb for adult females.

Reproduction

- Female black bears begin having cubs at three to five years of age.
- Mating generally occurs in the summer months but egg implantation is typically delayed for five months. Litter sizes ranging between one to five cubs are born in winter dens in January and February. There are approximately equal numbers of males and females in each litter.



photo: Paul Davidson

- Mother and cubs leave the den in April or May when the young weigh from four to eight pounds. Cubs stay with their mother throughout their first year. After spending their first winter in a den shared with their mother and siblings, cubs emerge in the spring and live with their mother until the family unit dissolves that summer. Immediately following the departure of her cubs, the female immediately goes back into estrus, breeds, and repeats the cycle.

Habits

- Black bears are not true hibernators. They go through a winter dormancy period termed "carnivorean lethargy." This helps them to survive food shortages and severe winter weather.
- During their winter "sleep" bears do not eat, drink, urinate, or defecate. Waste products are recycled through unique metabolic and physiological processes. Most black bears can be aroused from lethargy if disturbed.
- Male black bears roam across large distances, often covering two to eight times the area of females. Home ranges for males may increase during the mating season. Most bears move extensively in the fall while foraging to store winter fat reserves.
- A study done in the Tensas River Basin (U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service & University at Tennessee) indicates that adult males utilize approximately 40,000 acres and adult females 18,000 acres.



Slough with den trees

photo: Paul Davidson

Diet

- Although classified as carnivores, black bears are not active predators and are better described as opportunistic feeders, eating almost anything that is available.
- Louisiana black bear diet includes hard mast (acorns, pecans), agricultural crops, dewberries, blackberries, wild grapes, other fruited vines, elderberry, persimmon, pokeweed, thistle, and palmetto.